

# Letter to the editor: from WAY outside the closet

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As an openly gay male on this campus, my experiences are certainly different from those of closeted homosexuals.

This may sound familiar, as a similar sentence was published back in January: "As a closeted non-heterosexual male at the University of Richmond, my experiences on this campus are drastically different than those of heterosexuals."

The difference is that I am not closeted, and I am not focusing on the differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals, but rather the difference between the experiences of out-gays and closet-gays.

As highlighted in the January article, "Letter from the Closet," there is prejudice on this campus, and this prejudice is a main factor in either driving people into the closet, or keeping them locked in the closet. I, even as a freshman, am well aware of this prejudice. I have not directly experienced any major form of verbal or physical abuse, but I know students who have.

I have been out since seventh grade,

and since then I have never denied my homosexuality, no matter the circumstance. Even though I am aware of this prejudice, I have not retreated behind the closet door.

It may be true that I am going to be called a "fag" more than once during my stay at Richmond, but that doesn't scare me. I love the fact that I am gay, and that is the primary reason my experience at this school has already been, and will be, far different from those who are closeted.

To further illustrate the difference between the experience of a closeted gay and myself, an open gay, I will quote from "Letter from the Closet" and then change the words to fit my experience.

From the letter: "I distance myself from the hatred, confusion and distrust by altering the ways I talk, walk, dress and look, lest I be accused of being a 'fag.' What if I look at males too much or my clothes match too well? Instead, I look down and intentionally mismatch my clothing. What if I sit with a guy too often at lunch or what if I listen to the 'wrong' genre of music?"

Me: I will never distance myself from

the hatred. I don't like it, but I would rather face the issues head-on. I will not alter the way I talk, walk or dress, because even if I get accused of being a "fag," at least I am a "fag" who knows who he is. The ways I "talk, walk [and] dress" are parts of my individual identity, and if all these factors lead people to conclude that I am gay, and a "fag," then so be it. I don't have to worry about what people will think of me because of my outfit choices, how often I sit with a certain boy or my preferred genre of music.

As a freshman, I have already had a few encounters that would have been handled differently if I was closeted. When I met my roommate, I told him I was gay. He admitted that he had never had a gay friend before, and that he was nervous to have me as a roommate. He told me that he was going to try to deal with it, but that he might not be able to contend with this difficulty, in which case he would leave. He has decided to stay, and he thinks I'm "cool."

Apart from my roommate, I came out to all the males on my hall during orientation week. I blatantly stated that I was gay, and I told them about my experi-

ences of being a black openly gay male in high school. I assumed that I would get a negative response from them, or that they were going to ignore me or be mean to me.

My assumption was false – I have not had one problem with any of the guys on my hall. I haven't heard the word "fag" or the phrase, "That's so gay," since I told them I was gay and didn't appreciate such language.

If I were a closet-gay, none of the guys on my hall, including my roommate, would have had the opportunity to learn about my experiences, and I wouldn't have been able to successfully promote the ideas of tolerance throughout my residence hall. If I were closeted, I would not have been as effective at promoting the tolerance the person from "Letter" attempted to advocate.

If I look at myself in the mirror in the morning and see a gay boy, walk out the door and present a straight boy, then who am I? If I look at myself in the mirror in the morning and see a gay boy, and walk out the door and present a gay boy, then I am that, a gay boy. A proud gay boy is who I am.